

Chapter 3

The Camera Eye and Poetic Insight

"Some lies--for everyone's sake--must be maintained. Others, like this one, must be established and given credence--in order to get someone through to the other side. Intact." p. 475"

The same reason that is said by many critics to have made the portrait of the Holocaust appear so true, its realism, is the very one which is blamed for failing to make Schindler more real.

He (Schindler) remains a two-dimensional character because Keneally describes him so realistically. Had he been a character in a Graham Greene fiction, Schindler might have seemed more real. And we might have come closer to understanding the fundamentally theological paradox of his nature: that all his petty vices were serviceable for the cause of good: that in the ghastly world Schindler inhabited with such a buccaneer mixture of heroism and the gambling instinct, good could grow out of evil.¹

From this perspective, the book is not enough of a novel and is not suffused sufficiently with the novelist's own world view. It doesn't take advantage of the great freedom of the novelist to explore the minds and feelings of his characters. Unlike the way John Fowles handles *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, where the "narrator is flamboyantly voluble, richly endowed with powers to summarize, enter characters' minds, describe people and places, interpret, judge, generalize (often quite gratuitously), draw abstract conclusions, discuss what might have happened but didn't, meditate on the nature of novels in a 'self-conscious' way--and so on,"² Thomas Keneally is very circumspect in what he says about his characters. In other words, Keneally may say too much about the Holocaust, but he comments too little on Oskar Schindler.

This complaint is not only made about Schindler. As one critic carped, "individual characters have little depth or definition".³ One reason for this may be that the very techniques used to bring the Holocaust to life and make it seem true, weaken our identification with the characters. "(T)he impact of the horrors of *Schindler's List* is somewhat muffled. The fictional devices have a distancing effect."⁴ Or, as another critic phrased it, "The tension ought to bring the character to complex, arresting life; it doesn't, because the novel's narrative voice distances us from him so; Schindler never becomes more than a formally conceived and presented enigma."⁵

Schindler himself, while we follow his antics with greater fear and trembling than the Scarlet Pimpernel could ever command, remains an uncertain figure. Was he moved by compassion, by disgust with the Nazi regime? By (to begin with, at least) a capitalist's natural urge to do business freely? Was he a blend of gambler, sentimentalist and anarchist? Or motivated by a stubborn determination to keep his word to 'his' Jews and preserve his honour as a good

sport, a determination strengthened by three arrests and three interrogations? Was it a zest for excitement, compensating for the flatness of life with an ascetic (though morally admirable) wife?⁶

It is true that Keneally provides no apparent coherent explanation for Schindler's action. "Mr. Keneally explores rather than explains, his (Schindler's) curiously ambiguous personality, with his drinking, wenching and wheeler-dealing, a life-giver in all senses of the word."⁷ Some critics applauded the absence of a coherent explanation. "There is a mystery here, and Mr. Keneally is too good a writer to explain it."⁸ "Keneally wisely does not try to guess what motivated this extraordinary man."⁹

But whether the lack of an apparent coherent and/or adequate explanation was celebrated or bemoaned, critics were even faster at jumping in to provide their own explanation than they were later to do for the movie. For one critic, Schindler was a hollow man, and the salvation of the Jews gave meaning to his empty life. "It's possible, of course, that the Jews became as much a *raison d'être* for Schindler as they became for the Nazis. They provided him with a reason for living, a purpose, only his purpose was to save them while the aim of others of his countrymen was to kill them."¹⁰

The *New York Times* critic even anticipated taking the short step to the explanation of a saving grace used in the film.

The real Schindler owes his reputation for mercy and munificence to the company he kept. In the society of mass-murderers, the racketeer passes for a man of principle, distinguished only by the enormity of *their* crimes. These continue to defy analysis. 'Is there any cause in nature that makes these hard hearts?' Understandably at a loss, Keneally reverses the question and proposes, in effect, his own enigma: 'What lies behind this daring conscience, this exceptional compassion, this marvellous lack of race-hatred and blood-lust?' From here it is a short step to the mystic notion of divine grace working through the usual Catholic channels: a child-like hedonist, wayward prodigal, sensual adventurer and whisky-priest¹¹ equivalent is seized with a desire for souls 'in the absolute passion that characterized the exposed and flaming heart of the Jesus that hung on Emilie's wall'.¹²

One critic was not satisfied with projecting his own explanation into the novel in contradistinction to those of other critics; he provided a number of mutually inconsistent explanations on his own. Manly Johnson observed, "What could

have moved him (Schindler) to conceive the plan...Keneally professes not to have arrived at a satisfactory answer and leaves Schindler as much an enigma at the end as at the beginning,"¹³ Johnson then went on to offer one explanation of the motives for Oskar's action. "There is no reason, however, to doubt that he was moved by genuine altruism and ethical principles, along with revulsion against the savagery he witnessed."¹⁴ Then another. His actions were the result of a quest for power. The "compulsion to exercise power was preeminent among his motives."¹⁵ And not just power in general, but macho male power: "Every suborder of authority such as the paternal is seen here as complementing the satisfaction that Schindler derived from being the dominant male in his relations with women."¹⁶ And if the high moral principles, and the quest for power, specifically masculine power over women, were not sufficient, guilt can be thrown in as well. "Given the irregularity of his moral life in other respects, it is possible to read this act, extended over several years, as a combined form of confession and penance: confession because what he did was public, not private (even the SS knew his workers were Jews); penance, because he was genuinely contrite for what he could easily interpret as a state of affairs that had developed with his passive complicity to the point where it was irreversible."¹⁷ Yet, without any sense of irony, this very same critic went on to applaud Keneally's omission of any coherent explanation.

In thus representing the crux of our civilization's moral dilemma, Keneally is artistically right, it seems to me, in not speculating about Schindler and in presenting the various episodes over a span of five or six years so as to retain the enigmatic surface of the man as it must have appeared to his contemporaries. To do otherwise would have undercut credibility and allowed the entrance of some unforeseen motive into our judgement that might reduce the courage and moral grandeur of his act.¹⁸

Was Oskar Schindler a self-seeking hedonist who performs good deeds in spite of his own intentions? Was he an empty man who needed to give himself a mission? In the novel, was he infused with divine Christian grace at one point, as the film later suggested, or governed all along by his high moral principles? Was he on a power or a guilt trip?

Keneally goes out of his way to avoid giving Oskar Schindler the character of someone motivated for any of these reasons. Keneally's Oskar Schindler is not on a power or a guilt trip, or governed by moral principles at any time. He is not the Good Soldier Schweik or J. Alfred Prufrock. Virtually all of the critics seemed to miss the one explanation implicit in the text and brought out in the schizophrenic methodology used to construct the novel.

First, it is critical that we are clear about what needs to be explained. Oskar is considerate and generous as a capitalistic hedonist. He remained generous as a rescuer. However, he was never just a self-interested agent, so the issue is not why a self-interested man became a self-sacrificing man. The issue is also not his generosity. The central question requiring an explanation is why Oskar decided to trade in his collection of wealth for a collection of human beings.

Keneally's answer, in short, is that Oskar Schindler tried to do both. Yet, Keneally does not overtly answer the question why, when Oskar could no longer do both, when he had to risk virtually his entire fortune for the collection of human beings, he continued to make the sacrifices and take the risks he did. It is not his generosity, but the extremity of it that appears inexplicable. The only answer seems to be one that begs the question - he got carried away by the role he was playing. For Keneally, there was neither a moral conversion nor an adoption of any high moral principle which subsequently governed Oskar's actions. In Keneally's version of Schindler, Oskar is a pragmatist, but a pragmatist with a difference; he has a quality which is at once mysterious and prone to excess, a quality which allows Schindler to take on the charismatic leadership of a Huey Long or an Elmer Gantry. Oskar was Janus-faced; on one side the practical calculating instrumental rationalist, on the other a pagan god, a Dionysus. In the end, Dionysus subsumed his pragmatism. His poetic soul subverted his acute and practical observational approach to life.

Keneally describes Schindler. Keneally also defines him, not simply as a contradictory character, but as a **sign** of contradiction, that is, as a character who signifies a much larger contradiction. Though as an observer, Keneally is the eye of the camera in a novel written as if it were a movie, the vision of the camera-eye is interrupted by the author to directly address and inform the reader about what the author had concluded about Schindler, not at the end of the story, but intertwined with it. Both the camera and the commentary devices distance Keneally from Schindler. There is no impression that the author could reveal why Oskar did what he did simply by reenacting his thoughts, so that a reader would conclude that Oskar's actions were the consequence of his reflections and his moral convictions. There is a heavy red boundary between the author and his hero. The eye and ear of the novelist remain on the outside of Schindler's mind. So do Keneally's thoughts. But not his poetic feelings.

The combination of the camera eye and commentary provide an advantage over a movie. "One of the reasons that narratives and photographs are so convincing together is that they seem to represent a combination of pure object and

commentary on the object, each seeming to complete the other by reinforcing a sense of contrasting functions."¹⁹ The photographic narrative may centre on Oskar Schindler and picture the Holocaust. However, it is the author's poetic insights and commentary that assess his personality (and characterized the Holocaust).

The effect of the interaction of the two techniques emerge in the details. When we begin the novel, we are not given testimonials from the witnesses that Keneally interviewed. A poetic phrase sets the place and time to initiate the Prologue and the novel - "In Poland's deepest autumn" (p. 13). The opening scene begins just before the wintry blasts of the deadliest winter in Polish history. The poetic mode then shifts to the cinematic. The literary camera sits across the street and we watch a tall man emerge wearing an expensive overcoat and a double breasted dinner jacket. The camera moves immediately into a close-up, for the overcoat must have remained unbuttoned and we are able to see the gold-on-black Nazi lapel pin on his dinner jacket. It is cold. The man has a chauffeur and he waits with "fuming breath" for Schindler to enter this luxurious Adler limousine.

In the cinematic opening, before we even know Schindler's name, we know the country and the city and a street of that city. Keneally adopts the modern idiom of avoiding long description. The depictions are concise and they set the emotional pace. We know the clothes Oskar wears, the car he owns, and the fact that he had a chauffeur before we know what to call him. We are not invited to enter into Oskar's mind, but into the imagined perspective of the author as a camera. The shift in focus from the long wide view to the close-up one on the lapel pin provides the initial dramatic action, not only of the man in motion being observed, but ourselves as the observer. Further, it is all done with a few brief strokes so that there is no necessity to explain that the overcoat was open in order for us to look at the pin.

After Keneally takes an authorial aside, he reverts to the descriptive details such as Oskar's chain-smoking without tension and with style. Further, the camera eye reveals nothing of Oskar's feelings. His face did not betray what he felt as he passed cattle cars unlikely to hold any cattle. The concentration on factual details continues as the camera-eye of the novel pans back outside of the limousine and watches it traverse the ten kilometres to Plaszów from the first view of a ruined synagogue to an aerial photo of what Keneally ironically refers to as "what passed these days as the city of Jerusalem". The camera eye of the novel then moves in closer as the Ukrainian and Waffen SS convivially greet Herr Schindler and wave him on.

The limousine drives Oskar Schindler through the city streets towards the meeting with Amon Goeth, his arch-rival in

the novel. Only Keneally has the advantage of a novelist who can act like a tour guide as the 'film unreels' - *this is where Hans Frank had his seat of government over all of Poland* - and who can tell us that this was a frequent trip that Herr Schindler took. A movie would accomplish the same thing by showing very alert guards at the checkpoint at the Podgórze Bridge, who become relaxed and convivial as they wave Oskar Schindler's chauffeur driven car to continue.

The camera eye leaves hidden the evil beneath the surface. Though we have seen the cattle cars, the ruined synagogue and the criminal Waffen SS, the terror within the cattle cars, the horror beneath the ruin of the synagogue, and the mad purpose of the SS have yet to be unveiled as the novel begins with Oskar preparing to meet the devil himself. The extent of that devilry is indicated by the road that the limousine drives over which is paved with Jewish gravestones. The camp itself was built on the former Jewish cemetery as a clear message that Plaszów was intended to be just one mass grave with no markers for individuals who died there.

The novel's camera-eye then switches to Poldek Pfefferberg and the nineteen year old Liesek, Amon's orderly, and their attempt to get out the ring stain around Amon's bathtub. The novel's form allows some background to be provided on these characters - that Poldek, for example, had been a teacher and Liesek had been his pupil.²⁰ The camera-eye then switches back to Oskar. So far we have seen Oskar entering his limousine; sitting and chain-smoking in the back seat; passing the guards on the bridge; gazing out at the passing but ominous scene of a destroyed synagogue; driving down the road of paved gravestones. Now Oskar gets out of the limousine and enters Amon's villa, passing his homburg, coat and gloves to a Ukrainian orderly. He stands in the hall, taps his breast pocket to check if the gold-plated cigarette case intended as a gift for Amon is still there (in a movie scene, he would have to actually take it out so that the viewer could see it), and then enters the room.

The swift nervous style (in such contrast to the smooth Oskar), the montage, the swift scene changes without any transitions, the cumulative and studied detail, are all techniques borrowed from film-making. They would have disoriented a nineteenth century reader. This is a novel which borrows many of its methods from film and cinematic twentieth century novels rather than historical narratives or the craft of the nineteenth century novelist.

The perspective switches to two other characters who will provide a sense of continuity to the cross-section of victims that we will encounter as recognizable faces in this horror tale. The Rosner brothers are studiously playing Strauss melodies on their accordion and violin while trying to ensure

that they did not offend in any way. We picture the forced gaiety on their faces as they try excessively to please. It is not described. Our collaboration in the construction of a scene is invited.

The camera-eye of the novel then pans around the dinner table.

But it is the novelist who informs us of their ranks. In addition to himself and Amon, the guest list includes the hated Franz Bosch (who managed Amon's workshops at Plaszków), Julian Scherner (head of the SS for the Cracow region), and Rolf Czurda (chief of the Cracow Security Service), the latter two being Amon's superior officers. Oskar shared the dinner table with two other male guests, Julius Madritsch and his manager, Raimund Titsch. Both are identified by the novelist as enterprising and humane men in the treatment of their Jewish forced labourers. In addition to the seven men around the dinner table, there are the four high-class Polish and German prostitutes as part of the provisions available for the selection of Amon's two superior officers. Oskar's sexual magnetism is signalled by the way these girls respond to his entrance.

As the novel's camera-eye wanders among the guests, snippets of conversation are heard as they sip drinks and munch on appetizers revealing that the war effort on the eastern front is stalled in the Crimea, that a young officer had his legs blown off by a partisan bomb, that there is a general friendship evident in the business discussions among Madritsch, Titsch and Schindler.

These are not the first spoken words of the novel. When the novel opens when Poland's deepest autumn has already turned wintry, the first words are not those of Schindler, and certainly not the testimonials of the Schindler Jews. They are those of his chauffeur to warn Oskar of the slippery sidewalk. "Watch the pavement, Herr Schindler. It's as icy as a widow's heart." (p. 13) We are introduced to Schindler through a servant who speaks like a poet.

The second paragraph begins with the voice of the author: "In observing this small winter scene, we are on safe ground." We. Not Oskar Schindler. In a few poetic phrases the reader is introduced to the slippery ground on which Oskar Schindler operates to execute his rescue in an atmosphere as cold as a widow's heart. Further, Keneally describes the chauffeur's metaphoric description of the weather as a "lame comradely joke."

Comradely, yes. But why a joke? Because the chauffeur is not just a poet in his phrasing, but exhibits his poetic soul in the ironic comment on the meeting with Amon to which the chauffeur is about to drive him. But why a "lame" joke? Because no words, not even poetic ones, can capture the dicey

position in which Oskar Schindler has placed himself.

This is poetry, not historical photographic realism. But, as Aristotle noted, poetry deals with general truths whereas history only deals with particulars.²¹ That poetic imagination is conveyed not only in the phrasing, but in the author's asides to the reader; this adds to the sense of truth²² in spite of the complaints of some critics that Keneally relied too much on photographic realism and too little on the poetic devices available to the novelist.

If the commentary and the camera eye of the novel seem to distance us from the main character, why did Keneally not use the techniques of an empathetic historian to both enter into the mind of Oskar and add to the sense of historical accuracy? Historians of the Dilthey school believe that it is the responsibility of the historian "to put himself in another man's place and to think himself into the conditioning circumstances that governed other men's lives."²³ One would think that this type of history might provide a model for Keneally due to its concern with the inner freedom that leads to a powerful and effective action. Empathetic history is often focused on the creative action of a great personality who is able to transform an idea into a reality. The inner personality of such an individual provides the clue to his charismatic character and his overflowing creative ability to bind humans in a common bond of belief and collective action.

But the Dilthean historical model does not serve Keneally's purpose. One reason is that the objective of Dilthey historians is to understand the action of an historical agent in terms of the historical agent's *thoughts*.²⁴

"The goal of such explanation is to show that what was done was the thing to have done for the reasons given."²⁵ When Keneally describes the inside of his hero, it is to depict his feelings, not his thoughts.

In the ride to the meeting with Amon Goeth, the arch villain of the tale, the hero, who on the surface will continually be described in terms of "the German *bon vivant*, speculator, charmer," will be depicted as full of loathing rather than anticipation. "There had in fact never been a time when to sit and drink with Amon had not been a repellant business. Yet the revulsion Herr Schindler felt was a piquant kind, an ancient, exultant sense of abomination-of the same sort as, in a medieval painting, the just show for the damned. An emotion, that is, which stung Oskar rather than unmanned him." (p. 15) The feeling of abhorrence and detestation was not one of loathing something so detestable that the very thought of it made Oskar nauseous so that it immobilized him. Rather, the evil smell of Amon was agreeably pungent. It provoked rather than sickened Oskar.

'An abomination' is a term which recalls memories of medieval paintings or frescoes of naked men and women copulating in all variety of positions, not as in Hindu frescoes to evoke the delight of the Upanishads, but to stimulate both disgust and voyeuristic interest in the ambiguous details of the intertwined languorous bodies as they display the varieties of punishment and torment that Dante had described so vividly.

Keneally evokes Oskar's interior mood, not by our entry into Schindler's mind's eye when he first sees Amon, but by the Brechtian device of the author's interruption of the narrative flow. We are informed of it in a context which distances the author totally from the scene and reveals Oskar's emotional state. In the meeting at Amon's house, the first dramatic dialogue²⁶ of the novel is between Schindler and Bosch. And it is clear that the art of irony will not belong to the author, but to Schindler himself. Bosch says, "Business good, I see." Schindler replies, "You see that, do you, Herr Bosch." (p. 20) Then Keneally explains the subtle irony of the response, as well as Schindler's disdain for Bosch. Oskar knew that Bosch read the bulletins of the Main Armaments Board and, therefore, knew about those orders placed with Schindler's firm. In a very few words of exchange, the indirection of one man is countered with the friendly disdain of the other.

This is the same mock condescension with which Socrates responds to Thrasymachus when he enters the debate over justice in a fury at the teasing way the conversation had progressed thus far at the beginning of Plato's *Republic*. And it has the same basis - a play on the equivocation of a word. In Keneally's case, the word, appropriately, is 'see'. Bosch has made a claim to see in the sense of 'understand'. Oskar's ironic rebuke suggests that Bosch's seeing was much more mundane than any profession of insight; Bosch was only capable of literally seeing, of reading only what was in front of him. In other words, Oskar, with his friendly patter, was telling Bosch to his face that he couldn't really see in the sense of discerning anything unless he was presented with something very obvious.

Of course, these comments have a double irony. For they mirror precisely the two perspectives on sight adopted by Keneally. On the one hand, there is the camera eye which sees the surfaces. Then there is the poetic insight which Keneally, or his surrogates in the role of chauffeurs or other minions, provide.

There was a devilry in Oskar in taking such ironic risks, as if Oskar was possessed of the same *daimonion* or voice that insisted it be heard within Socrates. "In the old epics, a character is occasionally inhabited by a god, and then he acts beyond himself, living on the edge of wonder.

When the god leaves him he becomes ordinary once again."²⁷ This deviltry, this playfulness in Oskar, was associated with the divine and not with evil. But it was a different voice than the one that lived in the Socrates we are familiar with through the dialogues of Plato. This voice served as a divine presentiment to warn Socrates of injustice or misfortune.

Herein lies the origin of the need for deriving the last word on great events and important affairs of state from oracles, a 'divine sign' (in the case of Socrates), the entrails of animals, the feeding and flight of birds, etc. It was when men had not yet plumbed the depths of self-consciousness or risen out of their undifferentiated unity of substance to their independence that they lacked strength to look within their own being for the final word.²⁸

Schindler became aware of injustice, not by presentiment, but through direct observation. The daimon gave Oskar his faith in the immanence of good tidings rather than impending misfortune. It incited him to action and filled him with enthusiastic hope. It was Xenophon's rather than Plato's daimon.²⁹

Behind the daimon which licensed Schindler's irony - for it is difficult to imagine irony without the presence of such an inner voice - and which gave him this sort of mystical knowledge, there is also a complementary quality. The daimon taught ignorance, that is, not only an ignorance which did not allow a human to finally proclaim the nature of justice, but ignorance of what made a particular person tick.

When the Sphinx asked Oedipus a question concerning the nature of a particular man, she was propounding a puzzle which seems to be unanswerable. Just this unanswerability may be the Sphinxian secret. It may be conjectured that an apprehension of this outcome was back of much of the Socratic irony as well as the Socratic ignorance.³⁰

Behind Schindler's irony is the fundamental conviction that discerning the essential nature of any particular human being - the author's attempt to understand Schindler for example - must remain an unanswerable puzzle. This inscrutability is built into the very character that Keneally attributes to Oskar Schindler. But it is an apparent inscrutability. Like the sphinx, Thomas Keneally provides plenty of clues to indicate what he believed made Oskar Schindler tick.

The classical view of art is that it is an imitation of real life. It is the shadow on the wall of the cave. But it is a very remote imitation of Truth itself. For the real life of humans is itself an imitation, an effort to imitate the lives

of heroes and heroines, of mortal gods produced by Hollywood or handed down by tradition. In the classical view, these mortal gods are themselves made in the image of patterns that are eternal. (Plato's *Timaeus*) So if one is to understand the cousin of Truth, **twice** removed from the source, through an art form that is a cousin to Truth **thrice** removed, then one has also to recognize that no artistic medium, whether a film or a novel, can reflect the definitive truth. Yet, unless there is an ultimate reference point, all art will not only be ignorant, but ignorant of its fundamental ignorance. The ultimate inscrutability of Oskar for Keneally will only be uncovered if we unpack his ultimate reference point.

Keneally, through Leo Page (Leopold Pfefferberg), heard a myth told about a great figure from the past, Oskar Schindler, who had performed deeds wondrous to behold. Unlike a critical historian who tries to unpack such myths, Keneally approached this story with awe and amazement. In an age in which God is dead, to come across a tale of a genuine hero of classic proportions which an observer of the twentieth century believed could only be found in the dim past, was indeed perplexing. And since we have ceased even to believe that there are any eternal reference points, since we live in a world in which evil is purportedly found everywhere, it was even more impossible to comprehend such a hero than it had been for the Greeks who, with all their access to eternal truths, still approached such tales within an ironic mode and recognized up front the difficulties in providing a coherent understanding of such an intractable hero.³¹ For the Greeks, wisdom and insight into the human character are not within the ken of men; if there are gods or a God, such insight belongs to him (or her) alone.³² So we need the divine perspective, the ironic perspective of an inscrutable sphinx, to obtain such insight.

This not only means that Schindler looks at the world through irony, but also that Keneally looks at Schindler through the irony of seeking an understanding of Oskar's behaviour which he presents as inexplicable and puzzling. Looking at and examining Keneally's portrayal of Schindler, we must recognize that this portrait painted of Schindler's soul, of his psyche, is made of "all the images of a self-critical poetic mind which knows very well that its metaphors are often remote from its literal meaning and must, therefore, be entertained with irony."³³

By this one short piece of dialogue, "You see that, do you, Herr Bosch," we already gain more insight into Oskar than all the descriptions of Schindler, of his dress and mannerisms, of his moods and thoughts, that have thus far been provided. But we have not gotten to the bottom, the foundational reference point of Oskar.

Bosch, we have been told, occupies a formidable position. He runs Plaszków for Goeth. Bosch's cooperation is essential to Schindler's success. Why would Oskar risk antagonizing him? Only because Schindler knows that sarcasm, that any play on words or subtle ambiguities of meaning, would literally go right over Bosch's head. Without anything more needing to be said, we know that Bosch, whatever his organizational and administrative skills in running the slave-labour camp, is an intellectual pygmy. Bosch observes that Schindler is making a lot of money. Oskar responds ironically, with a wink to the reader, letting us know that Bosch is looking for a cut - what Bosch called "a generous gesture." Oskar replies, "Of course," but it is the author who comments on what Oskar felt. "He felt the nausea that goes with being used, and at the same time a sensation close to joy." (p. 20) Once again, we encounter Oskar Schindler's piquant and exultant sense of abomination. Oskar would use Bosch in turn.

The scene continues to elaborate on the fraud of Bosch needing the generous gesture of a donation of pots and pans for his aunt in Bremen, and then climaxes with Schindler rebuking Bosch for discussing his wife and her tolerance for his affairs. He is now angry, not just disgusted. The voice of the author inserts itself again, explaining Schindler's anger at Bosch' remarks, not so much because it seemed to demean himself, but because it demeaned his parents' marriage which was constituted of the same incompatible type of people as was his own. Keneally paints a picture of a hedonistic man who has married an ascetic woman and repeated the same error in judgement that his father made, a father with whom he was angry for doing precisely what he himself had done. His anger was as much directed at himself as at Bosch, and, at a deeper level, at his father.

The two basic feelings now exposed in Oskar - the exultant disgust and the anger - are complementary. Despising himself, Oskar Schindler despised and uses those whom he finds are governed by the same selfishness. Only Oskar does it for a higher purpose. Oskar uses his own hedonism and selfishness to advance a cause as puritanical as that of his mother.³⁴ If one believes - as Keneally evidently did - that the action was largely dictated by the agent's *passion*, the empathetic method of the historian would have been inappropriate.

If we return to the camera eye of the novel, the scene shifts back to the dinner around the table. The battered and beaten Helen Hirsch is introduced, not only by the author, but once again by Amon himself to his guests. Schindler had been told that the relationship between Goeth and Hirsch had recently taken a twisted path.

The description turns to the details of the food and the conversation shifts to focus on the industrialists themselves,

with joking references to the fate they could have if their SS friends were unprotective. The scene ends with Amon Goeth standing on a table singing a wordless tune in unison with the theme of *Madame Butterfly* which the Rosner brothers were playing. This not only alludes to unrequited passion and an unbridgable racial barrier, two themes in the opera, but there is a more general implication about the suicidal romantic madness of the Nazis in general. In *Playing for Time*, the SS brass at Auschwitz, after finishing up their horrendous duties, would almost always request the Auschwitz orchestra to play the final aria from *Madame Butterfly* prior to the heroine's suicide.

The novel's camera-eye shifts to Pfefferberg and Lisiek trying to scrub the ring out of the bathtub, then back again to the guests having their coffee and Oskar making excuses to leave. Then the two scenes are tied together as Amon is steered upstairs by one of his whores, in part as an act of compassion to save Helen from another beating. Amon comes across Lisiek and Pfefferberg sneaking out of the bathroom, and beats Lisiek instead of Helen. Suddenly, out of nowhere, we are told that several days later Amon shot Lisiek, not as Oskar thought for leaving the ring around the bathtub, but because Lisiek had harnessed a horse and buggy for Bosch without first asking the permission of Amon. Lisiek had committed what was a basic sin for a Nazi - disobedience.

Then the scene switches to the kitchen (not the wine cellar used in the movie) and evidently Oskar has not actually left. Helen is immediately apologetic. Oskar tries to lessen her anxiety and addresses her with respect as *Fraulein Hirsch*. The novel's camera eye follows Oskar as he moves around the table, puts his arm around the confused girl who does not know whether to trust the respect and softness in his voice or her own past experience of distrust of the rapaciousness of the Nazis. Oskar touches a cheek with a kiss, "It's not that sort of kiss," as he says in the movie, but adds, "I'm kissing you out of pity if you must know." (p. 27)³⁵ Oskar then kisses her again on the forehead, and they **both** weep.³⁶

Oskar offers the chocolate. Helen, after insisting she is well fed, confesses how she is mistreated physically, and explains that Amon is so unpredictable - "there's no set of rules you can keep to" to be safe. (p. 28) In turn, Oskar assures her that she will not be killed by Amon because Amon "enjoys" her.³⁷ The scene ends with Helen taking money out of a hiding place and giving it to Schindler to save her younger sister from being put in a cattle car. We are told that Oskar took the four thousand zloty "negligently" because it would be safer with him than in a niche behind Amon's china cabinet.

So we have the quick portraits of three of the characters: a sentimental, compassionate, ironic, bribing,

convivial, sexually magnetic but caring and respectful, honest Oskar driven by a combination of a sense of abomination and anger to make that abomination exult in turning the table on the Nazis for a higher purpose; a sadistic, woman beating, murdering Amon demanding obedience amongst a background collection of Gothic, hedonistic Nazis; and a portrait of one of the victims who, in spite of the hopeless situation she believes herself to be in, seems more concerned with her own sister than herself.

But for chance, Oskar could have been Amon. Oskar and Amon are pictured as twins with only two basic differences. Oskar is a confidence man; Amon is a crook. Oskar is a protector and lover of those he befriends; Amon is a sadist. "(T)he reflection can hardly be avoided that Amon was Oskar's dark brother, was the berserk and fanatic executioner Oskar might, by some unhappy reversal of his appetites, have become." (p. 171) Oskar says of Amon that it was the war that made him what he is; Amon is a product of his situation. For Keneally, it is luck and nature reinforced by circumstance³⁸ that determined that Oskar did not go the route of Amon. The treatment of Helen Hirsch is the litmus test for the dramatically different trajectories of their two lives.

More than the contrast with Amon, we get the insight into Oskar's own paradoxical character - the man who knows the extent of Nazi murderous intentions, but still trades with the devil and presumes the Nazis will always need Jewish labour. It is the latter assumption that is challenged in the novel when he sees the young girl, the girl in scarlet in the movie. In the novel, the sight does not motivate his shift to benevolence from selfishness, for he has clearly been kind all along, but leads him to recognize that the situation was far worse and more perilous than he thought it was.

The change in Oskar Schindler's behaviour in the novel is largely a product of Schindler's complex character. His self-interested advantageous calculations are at war with his aesthetic temperment. Oskar focused on saving Jews because of the daimon within Oskar that allowed him to grow and determine that he would combine his possessive individualism with his aesthetic and moral sensibilities by saving Jews. The motivation is not an external revelation, let alone some ersatz Christian grace.

It is not Oskar Schindler who recognizes these contradictory drives in his own soul or how they are "aufgehoben" to a higher level of action. It is Thomas Keneally who provides the insight by presenting it in the form of a sphinx like puzzle to be unravelled. Thomas Keneally does not himself provide the definitive rational explanation.

This is another reason why Keneally could not employ the

empathetic reenactment of the thoughts of an agent as a mode of undertaking history. Not only was Oskar Schindler governed in his actions by feelings rather than thoughts; those feelings were contradictory. The point of empathetic history is to find the rational coherence in an action, to see through any possible contradictions, and to understand the systematic connection between a person's thoughts and beliefs and his actions. Keneally determined that there was no such *rational coherence*. Oskar was an ambiguous character - a "*sign of contradiction* [my italics]." Keneally insisted on the essential ambiguity of Oskar Schindler, even after the film had been made and he had interviewed many more survivors - "the ambiguity of Schindler is, if anything, enriched by their (the Schindler Jews') reflections and by their telling tales about Oskar."³⁹

In the novel there is virtually no effort to enter empathetically into Schindler's mind and thoughts, though Keneally replicates enough of his speeches even where there could not possibly have been any witnesses. When Keneally describes Oskar's deepest feelings, it is **not** done by empathetic re-enactment, but through the voice of the author who suddenly distances himself from the scene and addresses the reader directly.

There is, therefore, a third reason that Keneally does not employ the empathetic method of the historian. Not only does the explanation for Oskar's actions reside in his passions rather than his thoughts, not only is Oskar a conflicted person rather than one operating out of a coherent rational framework, but, thirdly, Keneally believed that Oskar was larger than life, an expression of an historical force rather than the imposition of his own thoughts on history. For this reason alone, an historical empathetic analysis of the inside or 'thought-side' of Oskar Schindler would have seemed fruitless. Oskar is larger than life. That is why the action stops and Keneally says the story cannot be written "under such easy character headings." (p. 14)

It is Oskar Schindler who is put forth as a hero beyond the make up of ordinary mortals, With this position it would be totally inappropriate if Keneally behaved as if he were a godlike historian. Keneally distances himself from Schindler rather than purporting to provide an historical omniscient entrée and *introspective* description of Schindler's thoughts. He studiously wanted to avoid the position of historians who assume a divine skill in being able to leave their own time and place and enter fully into the mind set of their protagonist. Keneally's conclusions were to be based strictly on interviews and documents. Keneally did not want to give the impression that he was imaginatively reconstructing the way Schindler thought. His descriptions were attempts at creating a facsimile of the original. The stress was on replication

more than explanation.

But if so, characterizing Oskar Schindler as a force of history itself is said by some to detract from the verisimilitude. Marion Glastonbury complained that the novel unjustifiably elevated the hero. "(B)y identifying Schindler with redemptive virtue, casting him in the balance against monstrous evil, citing the Talmud's 'Righteous of the Nations', Keneally turns chronicle into panegyric and elevates the Direktor to a dignity unsustained by evidence."⁴⁰

Thus, although Keneally sets himself forward as an historian, he uses the language of a poet, attends to the passions of his hero, comments on his rational incoherence, and hints that Oskar Schindler is the expression of an historical force. All of this, however, adds rather than detracts from the feeling of reality conveyed in the novel even though it distances us from the hero. It complements the photographic realism as the camera eye of the novelist follows Oskar Schindler's movements. And the combination of the two techniques perfectly suit the character of an Oskar Schindler who is at once a keen observer with a calculating prudential eye on what will be advantageous to him, and the daimon-driven soul with a deep anger at injustice, not on the basis of moral principles, but at one human's betrayal of another, including his own. The combination of this anger made his sense of abomination exultant.

ENDNOTES

- . A.N. Wilson, *Books & Writers, Encounter*, Vol. 60, February 1983, p. 65.
- . Seymour Chatman, *Coming to Terms: The Rhetoric of Narrative in Fiction* and *Identities*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990, p. 165.
- . D.J. Enright, "Fouling up the System," *Times Literary Supplement*, October 2 1982, p. 1189.
- . John Gross, "Life Saving," *New York Review of Books*, Vol. 30, February 1 1983, p. 3.
- . Bruce Allen, *Christian Science Monitor*, November 10, 1982, p. 15.
- . D.J. Enright, "Fouling up the System," *Times Literary Supplement*, October 2 1982, p. 1189.
- . *Economist*, "One Just Man," Vol. 285, Nov. 13, 1982, p. 115.
- . Paul Zweig, "A Good Man in a Bad Time," *The New York Times Book Review*, October 24, 1982, p. 39.
- . Jean Strouse, "The Man Who Saved Jews," *Newsweek*, Vol. 101, p. 64.
- .. Richard Cohen, "One Man's Mission," *The New Republic*, Vol. 188, March 1 1983, p. 39.
- .. The reference is to the main character in Graham Greene's, *The Power and the Glory*.
- .. Marion Glastonbury, "Too Grateful," *New Statesman*, Vol. 104, November 1 1982, p. 25.
- .. Manly Johnson, *World Literature Today*, Vol. 57, Summer 1983, pp. 509.
- .. Op. cit.
- .. Ibid, p. 510.
- .. Op. cit.
- .. Op. cit.
- .. Op. cit.
- .. Young 1990 57-8.
- .. In the film, Liesek is made to appear as someone who was much younger than Amon's shooting him appears all the more horrific. We are led to believe that Liesek was being punished for his inability to get out the stubborn bathtub. In the novel, as I describe later in this chapter, we are told that it was allowing Amon's saddle to be used by a subordinate without Amon's permission.
- .. "(P)oetry is something more philosophic and of graver import than history since its statements are of the nature rather of universals, whereas those of history are singulars. By a universal statement I mean one as to what such and such kind of man will probably or necessarily say or do - which is the aim of poetry." Aristotle, *Poetics*, 9:1451;5-10.
- .. "(T)he story's realistic feel is further qualified by Keneally's direct addresses to the reader, confiding to us his difficulties in rendering Lindler's personality credibly as fictionalized narrative." Bruce Allen, *Christian Science Monitor*, November 10, 1982, p. 15.
- .. Herbert Butterfield, *The Whig Interpretation of History*, New York: W. W. Norton and Company, (1931) 1965, p. 94. Here, I am not endorsing the empathetic method for understanding history. I merely offer it as a possible methodological alternative for Keneally as a means to explore the technique he actually adopted and its significance. Wilhelm Dilthey refers to the empathetic method of history as *verstehen*. In such an explanation, the circumstances, agent's purpose, traits and means available and the normative context in which he finds himself and to which he subscribes, are depicted as the inner consciousness of the man. This though the action is connected with the action to explain it. (Cf. Ch. 4, Wilhelm Dilthey

Pattern and Meaning in History: Thoughts on History and Society, New York: Harper Row, 1961.) Like the British philosopher, R.G. Collingwood, Dilthey made a fundamental distinction between the inner thoughts or mind of the historic agent and the external side of any action. For an encapsulated version of Dilthey's views, see Jacques Kornberg, "Wilhelm Dilthey on the Self and Historical Understanding: The Theoretical Roots of *Geistesgeschichte*," *Central European History*, V: 3, September, 1972, pp. 295-317. For a more extended analysis, see Howard Nelson, *Wilhelm Dilthey's Philosophy of Historical Understanding: A Critical Analysis*, Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1969.

.. William Dray, *Laws and Explanation in History*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1957, p. 119.

.. The goal of the historian is to discover the 'thought-side' of an action. That is to, "penetrate behind appearances, achieve insight into the situation, identify himself sympathetically with the protagonist, project himself imaginatively into his situation." Ibid, p. 124. For a critical analysis of the view, see Howard Adelman, "Rational Explanation Reconsidered: Case Studies on the Hempel-Dray Model," *History and Theory*, XIII:3, 1974, pp. 208-24.

.. The chauffeur's remark is not responded to, precisely to convey the ambiguity of a person who allows his servants to behave with familiarity, but who shows he is the boss, that he is an aristocrat even if he makes room for democratic expression.

.. Paul Zweig, "A Good Man in a Bad Time," *The New York Times Book Review*, October 24, 1982, p. 39. After the war, Schindler lost his status as a god.

.. Hegel, *The Philosophy of Right*, tr. T.M.Knox., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1942, #279, p. 184. I am, of course, getting ahead of myself here. But to include, in fact, the very foundation, of this analysis may be adumbrated by citing Hegel further and at greater length. "Just as that wise man of [ancient] Socrates] searched in his own thought for what was good and beautiful, but left to his 'daemon' to know the petty contingent content of what he wanted or how--whether it would be good for him to keep company with this or that person, or good for one of his acquaintances to go on a journey, and similar unimportant things; in the same way the universal consciousness draws knowledge of the contingent from birds, or trees, or the yeasty earth, the vapour from which produces self-consciousness of its self-possession. For the contingent is something that is not self-possessed and is alien, and therefore the ethical consciousness lets itself settle such matters too, as by a throw of the dice, in an unthinking and alien manner. **When the individual, by using his understanding, takes up his mind, and after deliberation chooses what is advantageous for him, this is self-determination is based on the specific nature of his particular character.** This latter is itself contingent, and therefore knowledge supplied by the understanding as to what is advantageous to the individual is just such knowledge as that of the oracles or of the 'lot'; only that he who questions the oracle or 'lot' thereby expresses the ethical sentiment of indifference to what is contingent, while the former, on the other hand, treats what is intrinsically contingent as an important concern of his thinking and knowing. What is high in both, however, is not only to make deliberation the Oracle for a contingent action but, in addition, to know that this deliberate action is itself something contingent on account of its connection with the particular aspect of the action of its advantageousness." *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, tr. A.V. Miller, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977, #712, pp. 431-2.

.. Xenophon, a contemporary of Socrates, was a historian rather than

philosopher who wrote the *Anabasis*. He led the defeated remnant of the Athenians back from Persia during the period when Socrates was forced to take poison during the upsurge of intolerance following the Athenian defeat. In Xenophon's *Memorabilia*, the daimon of Socrates has an activist role, so that Xenophon applauded the assertion of will, contradicting Socrates' doctrine that virtue was a matter of an exercise of will.

.. Edward G. Ballard, *Socratic Ignorance: An Essay on Platonic Self-Knowledge* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1965, p. 122.

.. "(S)ome when they had fallen to earth consorted unhappily with such as led them to deeds of unrighteousness, wherefore they forgot the holy objects of their devotion. Few indeed are left that can still remember much, but when these discern the likeness of the things yonder, they are amazed, and no longer masters of themselves, and know not what is come upon them by reason of their perceptiveness dim." Plato, *Phaedrus*, 250a.

.. Cf. Plato, *Phaedrus*, 278d. In the *Apology* (23b), Plato says: "The wisest of men is he who has realized, like Socrates, that in respect of wisdom he is wholly worthless."

.. Edward G. Ballard, *Socratic Ignorance: An Essay on Platonic Self-Knowledge* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1965, p. 174.

.. Clearly, Keneally does not hold the position that Aristotle held that man belonged either to those who were virtuous or those committed to vice. "The subjects the imitator represents are actions, with agents who are necessarily either good men or bad - the diversities of human character being nearly always derivative from this primary distinction, since the line between virtue and vice is one dividing the whole of mankind." *Poetics*, 2:1448a:1-4.

.. This sentence is omitted in the movie.

.. The Oskar of the book is clearly more sensitive, more emotional, and more sentimental than the detached compassion which Liam Neeson portrays.

.. The movie substitution that Amon is not indifferent, and kills only what he does not care about, is, in fact, an improvement on the original script of the dialogue in the novel.

.. Steiner's study of the SS supports this interpretation. "The shifts occurring in the display of personality characteristics when social conditions change dramatically is absolutely striking. The sadistic-prone - or authoritarian character, who may have played a meek or even friendly role under one set of circumstances, may become an absolutely destructive individual in a totalitarianistic society in which aggression is rewarded." (J.M. Steiner, *The Tomorrow and today: A sociopsychological study of some SS killers*, New York: Basic Books, 1972, p. 432.)

.. Thomas Keneally, as quoted in an interview by Philip Marchand, "Realism fails to tarnish Schindler's List hero," *The Toronto Daily Star*, April 23, 1993.

.. Marion Glastonbury, "Too Grateful," *New Statesman*, Vol. 104, November 32, p. 25.